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Background Briefing for the DCI
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Central America

Prime Minister Gonzalez disagrees with what he regards as US strategy in Central America and believes he can help resolve the area's conflicts. He is also spurred into greater activism in Central America by Spain's traditional cultural links in the region, a determination to use those historical ties to expand Spanish trade and political influence, and a desire to please leftists at home by supporting so-called "progressive forces" in other parts of the globe.

-- Gonzalez believes Washington's reliance on the Contras -- which he considers use of military force --is counterproductive because it reinforces the hardliners in Managua while reducing the possibility of internal liberalization in Nicaragua and strengthening Managua's ties to the Soviet Bloc.

-- The Spanish also believe that Castro is a key player in the region, and they tend to ignore Havana's underlying revolutionary impulse. In their view, positive overtures from Washington have a reasonable chance of moderating Castro's behavior in Central America and the Caribbean.

-- We believe Gonzalez's plans to visit Cuba by early next year are driven by the perception that he can encourage Castro to play a more responsible role. He probably also hopes the trip will buttress his efforts to strike an independent diplomatic posture while he pursues difficult base negotiations with Washington and help deflect flak from rival politicians at home who are critical of by his moves to increase Spanish participation in NATO.

The Spanish recognize that they have little direct diplomatic, economic, or military leverage in Central America, but they have worked to magnify their influence by actively identifying with leaders of the Contadora process--particularly Mexico and Colombia.

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-- Gonzalez recognizes, however, that Central America is vital to the United States and only of secondary importance to Spain, and he is likely to continue to avoid actions that would provoke strong displeasure in Washington.

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